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TSUNAMI DISASTER RELIEF SCAMS

BISMARCK – Across the nation, charities and nonprofit organizations are springing into action to assist the victims of the Tsunami. Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem cautions that such disasters provide a perfect opportunity for scam artists to exploit the generous nature of North Dakotans.

“Reports of Tsunami relief scams are already coming from other parts of the country, although so far there have not been any complaints about such scams in North Dakota,” said Stenehjem. “However, with so many relief organizations now taking donations over the Internet, bogus websites are popping up daily and it is especially important to make sure both the organization and the Internet address are legitimate. Please give generously, but give wisely.”

Information about legitimate charities and links to those websites is available from the following “watchdog” sites:

- The Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance, at: www.give.org
- U.S. Agency for International Development, at: http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia_near_east/tsunami/ngolist.html
- The American Council for Voluntary International Action, at: <http://www.interaction.org/sasia/index.html>
- Center for International Disaster Information, at: <http://www.cidi.org/>
- Charity Navigator, at: <http://www.charitynavigator.org/>
- Network for Good, at: <http://www.networkforgood.org/topics/international/earthquake/tsunami122604.aspx?source=Yahoo&cmpgn=CRS>.

Most charities involved in international disaster relief operations need donations of money rather than food or clothes. Also, you may wish to specify that your donation be used for “Tsunami” relief (instead of another international relief operation) if you can.

Here are some tips from the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection division to ensure your generosity helps the people who need it:

- Do not respond to e-mail solicitations for donations, or click on a link contained in such an e-mail.
- Be wary of telephone solicitations or solicitations made door-to-door.
- Never give out bank account and credit card numbers over the phone to someone who has contacted you.

- If making a contribution via the Internet, before entering your account information, make sure the website is secure and the URL is not hidden.
- Be wary of anyone who presses you for an immediate donation, or offers to send someone to pick up your donation.
- Ask where the money goes. Be suspicious if the charity refuses to answer questions about what percentage of your donation goes to the relief effort.
- Give money to organizations you know. Beware of an organization with a copycat name.